

Microsoft Partners with IndependenceFirst on New Project

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Milwaukee, WI—The Microsoft Accessibility Resource Centers (MARC)s, a new nationwide Microsoft project, are now showing visitors what's possible with accessible technology solutions available on computers today. In Wisconsin, IndependenceFirst, a Metro Milwaukee nonprofit service provider for people with disabilities and business resource on access and workforce accommodations, was notified that it is the state's only Microsoft Accessibility Resource Center (MARC). "It's a privilege to be selected," says Lee Schulz, IndependenceFirst's Executive Director, "Microsoft's commitment to creating products that help all people use computers easier is not understood by many businesses and individual users. We will get the word out and hope to increase opportunities for people with disabilities and the community at large."

The project shows Microsoft product features that can aid all users—with and without disabilities. Whether computer users want to prevent injury, or currently experience reduced eyesight, wrist/arm discomfort, or hearing loss, IndependenceFirst's MARC will demonstrate accessibility options and assistive technology products that make computers easier and more comfortable to use. "Our goal is to work with centers across North America to increase awareness of accessible technology solutions that are available on today's computers," notes LaDeana Huyler, Product Planner, Microsoft Accessible Technology Group.

Information Technology and Human Resource professionals may find through IndependenceFirst's MARC that Microsoft's features could eliminate the need for accommodations that would have been at an additional cost to employers or individual users. If businesses incorporate this knowledge and use Microsoft access features in new hiring practices, workstation setup, retention efforts for aging workers or those with work-related disability, there could be a real cost savings and a net gain on the bottom line.

IndependenceFirst's MARC is equipped with video demonstrations and accessibility tutorials that show how to set computers for individual standards of ease, convenience, and comfort. Staff experts in computer technology and accessibility are available to field questions and assist center visitors in learning about and setting accessibility options and working with assistive technology. Microsoft Accessibility Resource CD Sets that further explain and demonstrate Microsoft Windows XP accessibility options are available. For more information about IndependenceFirst's Microsoft Accessibility Resource Center or to get on the list for upcoming training classes, please call Cindi Pichler at 414-291-7520 V/TTY or email at cpichler@independencefirst.org.

The Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs (ATAP) and the State Assistive Technology Programs are collaborating with Microsoft and the Alliance for Technology Access (ATA) to establish the MARC Centers. On the web, <http://www.microsoft.com/enable/centers/>. IndependenceFirst is Metro Milwaukee's primary nonprofit resource on access and independent living for people with disabilities.

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